

**Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services  
Bureau of Communicable Disease Control and Prevention**

***Frequently Asked Questions  
Hospital Recruitment for ESSENCE***

***Please find more information on this project at  
<http://health.mo.gov/data/essence/hospitalrecruit.php>***

***Q: Why does the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (MDHSS) want my hospital's data?***

A: MDHSS received a grant specifically to enhance regional surveillance in the Kansas City metropolitan area by acquiring data from Kansas and Missouri hospitals. Hospitals were pre-selected due to their geographic location as awarded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This bi-state surveillance collaborative is important because communicable disease outbreaks and other public health events do not recognize borders.

***Q: What is ESSENCE?***

A: **E**lectronic **S**urveillance **S**ystem for the **E**arly **N**otification of **C**ommunity-based **E**pidemics (ESSENCE) software analyzes and displays emergency department (ED) visit data for use by public health authorities and staff from participating hospitals. ESSENCE is web based and available 24/7/365 for authorized users. ESSENCE is used for daily surveillance of ED trends by syndrome group (e.g., respiratory, gastrointestinal, rash, botulism-like) and to track ongoing public health events by monitoring ED visits over time, demography, and geography. The system has been used to successfully track seasonal influenza, injuries following severe weather, gastrointestinal outbreaks, and chemical exposure events.

***Q: What do my state and local health authorities think of this?***

A: Missouri MDHSS has obtained support for this project from authorities at the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. Local public health agencies in Kansas and Missouri have been updated about this project as well.

***Q: How will using ESSENCE benefit my hospital?***

A: ESSENCE access will be offered to your hospital staff and may provide an alternative to your existing infection control or ED visit monitoring procedures. ESSENCE offers a view of statewide and regional trends for comparison to your hospital's data. Also, contributing to this system will provide real-time data to public health and hospital staff which will improve their abilities to detect and respond to outbreaks and other emergencies in the bi-state area.

***Q: Do my staff have to enter more ED data manually?***

A: No, we utilize data from your hospital information or electronic health record (EHR) system that you currently use for billing and patient records. Your hospital information technology (IT) staff, hospital information system vendor, or other company of your choice simply put data into a standard format and transmit them securely to MDHSS for use in ESSENCE. Technical guidance documents and technical support will be provided by MDHSS to assist with this effort.

***Q: What will this cost my hospital and what is the deadline?***

A: The CDC grant awarded to MDHSS provides funding to establish contracts to reimburse hospitals for costs associated with formatting and transmitting data for use in ESSENCE. Funds and timelines are limited, however. All work for this project must be complete by September 15, 2012.

***Q: Is my hospital eligible to participate?***

A: If you received a letter from us about this project, your hospital is located within the geographic area specified within the grant. Additionally, your hospital must meet the following requirements: the hospital must have an ED, have electronic ED records that are linkable to electronic medical records via a unique identifier, and must have a virtual private network or similar communications capabilities.

***Q: Do you have specific technical guidance on how to format electronic data for ESSENCE?***

A: Yes, IT staff and/or IT vendors will be able to use Missouri's technical guidance documents to determine what needs to be done to participate in ESSENCE recruitment. The most up-to-date guidance is posted at: <http://health.mo.gov/data/essence/hospitalrecruit.php>.

***Q: How does MDHSS protect hospital and patient data?***

A: MDHSS protects data used in ESSENCE in two ways. First, all data are transmitted and stored within a secure environment. Secondly, Missouri state law specifically protects data collected for this type of surveillance. Therefore, personal identifiers such as name, address, date of birth and social security number are not displayed in ESSENCE. The ESSENCE policies and procedures and associated laws are available at <http://health.mo.gov/data/essence/laws.php>.

***Q: Which hospitals currently participate in ESSENCE?***

A: A total of 95 facilities in both Missouri and Illinois participate in ESSENCE; a map of these facilities can be found at <http://health.mo.gov/data/essence/pdf/moimap.pdf>.

***Q: Will participating in ESSENCE create more work for my hospital staff in the long run?***

A: Based on our experience with over 90 facilities, once IT staff format the data, very little maintenance is needed for data transmission. MDHSS staff review ESSENCE daily and may occasionally have questions for your hospital infection control professionals; your local public health agency will make all contacts with your staff. On average, each facility is contacted only once or twice per year regarding potential outbreaks or clusters.

***Q: Can I view information for other hospitals?***

A: You can only view hospital-identified data from your hospital. However, if you are part of a health care system, you will be able to view information for all hospitals within your network.

***Q: Can I view statewide or local trends that might affect my hospital?***

A: Yes. ESSENCE is designed for hospital users to view all of their own facility's data as well as regional and statewide alerts in syndrome groups mentioned above. You can "drill down" to view details on only your hospital or hospital group's data.

***Q: Will MDHSS train new ESSENCE users?***

A: Yes, MDHSS will provide self-study materials for new users, followed by in-person sessions or web-based seminars.

***Q: Whom do I contact if I have general or administrative questions?***

A: The Missouri ESSENCE Program can be contacted at **573-751-6407** or [Essence.Essence@health.mo.gov](mailto:Essence.Essence@health.mo.gov).